Did Bible commentators Philip Doddridge and John Gill espouse a form of ‘pre-tribulation rapture’ eschatology, and did it have any resemblance to current trends in ‘Dispensationalism’?

Philip Doddridge (1738) and John Gill (1748) wrote commentaries that used the term "rapture" and spoke of it as imminent, with the goal of preserving believers from judgment. However, their views did not constitute what is now understood as dispensational pre-tribulation rapture theology.[1]

Key Distinctions

What Doddridge and Gill Actually Believed

Both commentators were historicist premillennialists who believed in a pre-millennial resurrection of the just. This placed them in continuity with early church chiliasm, but distinct from modern dispensationalism. The critical difference is that Gill, in particular, did not believe in a separation between Israel and the Church—he believed that the Church *is* true Israel, and anyone in union with Christ is true Israel. This rejection of the Israel/Church distinction is the fundamental departure from dispensational theology.[2]

The "Pre-Conflagration" vs. "Pre-Tribulation" Confusion

Modern claims that Doddridge and Gill held pre-tribulation views often stem from a "twisting of their pre-conflagration statements". These historicists believed in a gathering of saints before final judgment (the "conflagration"), but this is distinct from the dispensational two-phase return of Christ (rapture followed by Second Coming). Gill's millennium was marked by the resurrection of the just at its beginning and the resurrection of the unjust at its end—a sequential framework more akin to historical premillennialism than dispensationalism.[3] [2]

Resemblance to Dispensationalism

The resemblance is superficial at best. While both camps affirm:

- A future, literal millennium
- A pre-millennial resurrection/rapture of the Church

Doddridge and Gill lacked the defining dispensational distinctives:

- A separation between Israel and the Church

- A two-phase return of Christ (secret rapture vs. glorious appearing)
- A parenthetical Church Age interrupting prophetic fulfillment for Israel
- A pretribulational escape from the entire seven-year tribulation period

The earlier dispensationalists themselves—including Darby, Scofield, and Walvoord—honestly admitted that pre-tribulation rapture was a recent development, not found in the historicist commentaries of the 18th century.[3]

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1. https://christinprophecy.org/articles/the-origin-of-the-concept-of-a-pre-tribulation-rapture/
2. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ww_35-OVhH8
3. https://scripturethoughts.wordpress.com/tag/john-gill/
4. https://www.facebook.com/groups/278160135977556/posts/2079568895836662/
5. https://truthandtidings.com/2020/07/the-rapture-a-pre-darby-rapture/
6. https://covenantconfessions.com/dismantling-dispensationalism-examining-the-historical-origins-of-dispensationalism/
7. https://www.facebook.com/ed.yearack/posts/listen-of-pre-tribulation-scholars-bible-teachersa-list-of-bible-scholars-who-sp/122160616742294590/
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9. https://www.facebook.com/groups/eschatologyETS/posts/7763174487102968/
10. https://www.harvesthousepublishers.com/what-history-really-shows-early-christian-perspectives-on-the-rapture/
11. https://www.raptureready.com/philip-doddridge/
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13. https://www.jigministries.org/bible-studies/prophecy-studies/the-history-of-the-pre-trib-rapture
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